

TITLE	: INTERPRETATION OF THE PROTOCOL FOR COMMITTEE SITE VISITS		
TO / ON	: Planning Control Committee		22 nd April 2002
FROM	: Borough Planning & Economic Development Officer		
STATUS	: FOR PUBLICATION		

1.0 TYPE OF DECISION

1.1 What type of decision is to be taken:-

EXECUTIVE DECISION			COUNCIL DECISION	
Key		Non Key		Yes

1.2 If a key decision, has it been included in the Forward Plan

Inclusion in Forward Plan	(Yes or No)	Date of Plan	

2.0 SUMMARY

The report considers the criteria and procedures for deciding upon a Committee site visit and indicates how they can be interpreted in a more specific way.

3.0 **OPTIONS AND RECOMMENDED OPTIONS (with reasons)**

<p><u>Recommended Option</u></p> <p>The recommendation is that the interpretation of the criteria and procedures for deciding upon a Planning Control Committee site visit be made more specific, in order to ensure transparency in decision-making and a more effective use of Committee Members' time.</p> <p><u>Other Options</u></p> <p>To make further suggested alterations to the interpretation of the criteria and procedures.</p> <p>Not to make any alterations to the interpretation of the existing criteria and procedures.</p>
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4.0 **THIS REPORT HAS THE FOLLOWING IMPLICATIONS**

Corporate Aims	Improving transport and the environment.
Policy Framework	Code of Conduct for Probity in Planning
Statement by Monitoring Officer	TO BE COMPLETED
Statement by Director of Finance & E-Government	There are no direct financial implications in connection with this report.
Human Resource IT/Land and Property Implications	N/A

Wards/Area Boards affected	All		
Scrutiny Panel's Interest	Environment & Transport		
Consultations	None required		
Call-in			
Briefings	Executive Members/ Chair		Chief Executive

5.0 INTRODUCTION

5.1 The Council's new constitution of 2001 included a Protocol for Planning Committee site visits. The Protocol is set out in the Code of Conduct for Probity in Planning which has been updated. It sets out in general terms the circumstances when a site visit is appropriate. It has worked well enough over the last couple of years, but it is felt that improvements could be made to the interpretation of the Protocol in the light of experience.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 Site visits are an important way of enabling the Committee to visualise a proposal, particularly in cases that are complex, or at the margins of acceptability/non acceptability. However, Members of the Committee have suggested from time to time that some site visits have not been especially helpful, or that the reason for the visit is not always clear.

7.0 ISSUES

7.1 Whilst the wording of the Protocol is clear in terms of principles, it would be helpful to agree in more detail how these principles should be interpreted on a workaday basis.

7.2 **Clause 1 of the existing Protocol says that "site visits shall only be held following a resolution of the Planning Control Committee or as may otherwise be authorised by the Chair in consultation with the Borough Planning Officer and should be restricted to allowing Members to visualise the development".**

7.3 It is suggested that Clause 1 be interpreted in the following ways:

- (a) A request for a site visit from any Member (whether or not a Member of Planning Control Committee) will only be agreed following a specific resolution put before the Committee (by The Chair or other Members of the Committee) and voted upon. The Committee will not automatically agree all Member requests for a site visit. (Councillors not on the Committee will have their request put forward by a resolution from The Chair or a resolution from another Member of the Committee).
- (b) Applicants/members of the public may suggest site visits. However, any such suggestions from the applicant/public will have to be put to the Committee in the form of a resolution from The Chair or a Member of the Committee, as in (a) above.
- (c) If the Committee votes to have a site visit, the planning reasons for the site visit will be recorded. The reasons must relate to/help with the understanding of **planning matters only**. Site visits will not be held for other matters which lie outside the Committee's control e.g. boundary disputes; loss of view; matters to do with Environmental Health, the Environment Agency, the Police, or other statutory bodies.

7.4 **Clause 2 of the existing Protocol says that "site visits shall only be attended by the appointed Councillors and relevant Ward Members, along with the appropriate Council Officers".**

7.5 It is suggested that Clause 2 be interpreted in the following ways:

- (a) The name of the Member who initially asked for the site visit should be noted in the Minutes. (If the initial request comes from a Councillor who is not on the Committee the initiating Councillor will obviously not be the one who puts forward the resolution at Committee).
- (b) The Member who makes the initial request for the site visit should be asked to attend the site meeting.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

8.1 It is hoped that these interpretations of the principles within the Protocol will help the Planning Control Committee carry out its business more effectively, and enable applicants/the public to see more easily the basis on which decision are made.

BRIAN DANIEL
BOROUGH PLANNING & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

Background documents:

2001 New Council Constitution

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